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REVIEWS.

The Place of Authority in Matters of Religious Belief. By Vincent Henry Stanton, D.D. London: Longmans, Green & Co. 1891.

WITHIN the past two years no less than three works on the subject of the place of authority in religious belief have appeared from the pens of eminent theologians. Dr. Salmon, the learned Provost of Trinity College, Dublin, in his lectures on the "Infallibility of the Church," has dealt the most crushing blow that the peculiarly Roman theory of ecclesiastical authority has ever received; and Dr. James Martineau, with characteristic brilliancy of style and subtlety of discrimination, in his "Seat of Authority in Religion," has carried out the subjective tendencies of popular Protestantism to an actual denial of the fundamental facts of historical Christianity. The two books forcibly illustrate the dangers which beset Protestant theologians in the discussion of authority in religion. Their best efforts have always seemed weak, if not to themselves, certainly to others, and the mistiness and vagueness and uncertainty of statement in their most labored theories have become the stock in trade of the average Roman Catholic controversialist, and a fair target for the keen satire of writers like Frederic Harrison and Matthew Arnold. Dr. Salmon's book, for example, is careful, logical, and overwhelming in its demolition of the modern Roman Catholic position, and the argument marches remorselessly like a great engine pulverizing the stones on the highway. But it is impossible for the thoughtful reader not to feel that the work of destruction is almost too successful; that very little, if anything, is left to rest on; and that the exhortation "to use the means which Christ has given him for the education of his own reason and conscience" is a rather ineffectual medicine for the man oppressed with doubt. The question will arise, if the individual reason and con-

science are the ultimate appeal for the interpretation of Scripture, why are they not also for the authority of Scripture, and, in short, how can the certain knowledge of truth be regarded as possible for men, who, with the same means, arrive at such contradictory conclusions? Dr. Martineau is at least consistent. Like Schleiermacher, whom he in some respects resembles, his work, though intensely subjective, is intended to be positive and constructive. With him the only possible seat of authority in religion is his own conscience—the only authority, that which reveals itself in the intuitions of his own soul. He thus excludes all external authority—not only of the Church and the Bible, but of Christ himself. For after all, in his theory, Christ is to be regarded only as an exceptional and remarkable representative of religious sincerity and earnestness, whose lofty consciousness of the true relations of God and man is to be emulated, but whose individual opinions are not to be uncritically accepted. Thus the objective, authoritative element in Christianity is eliminated and natural and revealed religion differ only in degree and not in kind.

Is there, then, any alternative which serious men may adopt other than these two extremes of natural illumination and papal infallibility? Prof. Stanton thinks there is, and in his recent work on the "Place of Authority in Religious Belief" has presented a calm and carefully reasoned argument, which cannot but prove helpful to a large and increasing class of minds, that refuse to surrender their freedom and yet shrink from the consequences of unrestricted individualism. The crucial point in the discussion is whether there is now, or ever was, an authoritative revelation of truth from God independent of the exercise of human reason—a revelation, in other words, which implies the communication of truth which man cannot infer from his moral experience, nor attain to by the normal use of his intellectual powers. This is what Dr. Martineau seems to deny, and this is the fundamental assumption of Christianity with which Dr. Stanton begins. In the last analysis it is really the

alternative between the existence and non-existence of truth at all, between truth as objective and infinite reality and truth as variable, finite, and contingent upon the conclusions of individual minds. Assuming, however, the fact of such a revelation, the authentication of it centres in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. The evidence may be external and historical, as *e. g.*, the display of supernatural power in miracle and prophecy; or it may be internal, *i. e.*, the correspondence to the needs of the moral and spiritual nature of man; or, as is the case with Christianity, it may be both. In our day Christian apologists have freed themselves from the bondage of the Calvinistic position that the moral nature of man is not competent to be brought in evidence as to the attributes of God and his declared will. And Dr. Stanton, in showing the danger of this theory as philosophically espoused by Dean Mansel, defends Bishop Butler against the charge of favoring it by the important distinction that "it is one thing to remember that we may have misunderstood the purport of a doctrine which repels us, or that if we could see the whole of a course of action of which we know but a part, that which seems harsh and meaningless in it would be found not to be so. It is quite another to suppose that righteousness and love differ in God and in man, and to be required to accept propositions as truths which assume such a difference" (p. 48). The authentication of the fact and content of revelation naturally leads to a consideration of the value and importance of the witness of the Christian consciousness, which corresponds to the argument *e consensu gentium* and involves a correction of J. S. Mill's misapprehension of it. The analogy of the progress of science and of ordinary education compels us to expect, in the transmission of Christian truth, the exercise of the teaching office by the Church, and the spiritual illumination of the Church may be regarded as focussed in the general or ecumenical councils. Such determinations of doctrinal questions may not indeed be taken as absolutely infallible—as God is infallible—but, as expressing the mind of Christendom, they rightly com-

mand the assent of individual Christians who realize that training and discipline, are the necessary preparation for intellectual, as they are for moral and spiritual development. "There is an inheritance of authoritative belief which has been preserved to us and which is to this day rendered available for us, because the Christian society is a fact, because there has been and is in Christendom an organized life." . . . "There are doctrines which have been formulated to protect genuine Christian faith from the inroads of alien principles," and "it is no small gain if only the treasures and the fruit of the achievements of the past are placed in our hands and made a real possession for us" (pp. 159, 160).

The contention of the Protestant controversialists that the Bible alone is the sufficient appeal in determining the value and importance of Christian doctrine is quite as faulty as the Roman Catholic reliance upon the absolute, unlimited authority of the Church. As in the broader question of infallibility, the truth lies between the two extremes, for as a matter of fact the authority of the Bible cannot be established without the Church, nor that of the Church without the Bible. The interdependence of these two sources of doctrinal definition appears in the actual history of Christianity at the first, and is repeatedly illustrated in the experience of individual minds to-day. It is possible without any theory of the Church to attain to a belief in the substantial truth of the great outlines of Christian revelation—and this is what is constantly happening—but this is quite consistent with the other fact that anything like a complete and adequate view of Scripture or of Christian doctrine is impossible without her guidance and instruction. As Dr. Stanton says, "When the Church in the second century was beginning to define her belief in regard to the New Testament writings and the most fundamental articles of her creed, she had as yet no clear view of her function as an authoritative teacher of truth. In the very process of dealing with the questions brought before her, she arrived at a consciousness of it, and improved the organ for its expression,

and thus became fitted for still more delicate tasks of the same kind" (p. 68).

It is but a corollary from this to say that the Church to-day claiming such authority, must be able to show that she has preserved her continuity of life with the past; that to exercise such authority effectually she should be blessed with a visible unity; and that to bring such exercise into harmony with modern progress she should preserve entire freedom without license within her borders.

Altogether Dr. Stanton has produced a helpful book on a difficult but important subject, and apart from the essential line of the argument, there are, from time to time, very useful digressions, as, for example, upon the nature and value of the Old Testament writing, which evince a careful scholarship and a practical wisdom, necessary for these days. We cannot help thinking, however, that the results would have been more satisfactory if he had given an account of the acts of the general councils and of that inheritance of fundamental truth which he claims has been handed down to us. And in this rather misty age of ours there are some subjects, and religion is one of them, where a man ought to dare to be definite and explicit. Dr. Stanton does not appear to think so. At any rate, there are points in his argument where an earnest reader must feel that a clear conclusion is just missed if not avoided. Perhaps his is the better way. The theme is too great, too complex to be reduced to the limits of a formula, and the author's sincerity and carefulness are admirable. Yet, in the face of so much literature that is hesitating and halting in its tone, one could wish that he had expressed directly and unreservedly what he evidently thinks about the Church's position, and paid less attention to that universal Christian consciousness, of which after all the Church is the only visible, appreciable exponent and witness. That we regard his book as a very valuable one is, however, apparent from the fact that we have chosen to review it a year after its publication. We hope it will not be so long before we are allowed to review another.